

Computer Use, 1997

Adults are more likely to use computers than ever before, and the widespread use of computers by school children promises future growth.

In an environment of rapidly changing technology, information about computer use can seem as outdated as last year's models. But because the Census Bureau has been collecting data on computer use since 1984, it can provide valuable insights into changing computer usage.

At work, school, and home, the personal computer has become a basic tool, according to the October 1997 Current Population Survey (CPS). In 1997, 37 percent of American households had a computer, compared with only 8 percent in 1984. Although households with high incomes were more likely than others to have a computer, computer presence in the home rose in general across many segments of society between 1993 and 1997. In 1997, almost half of all adults used computers, but three out of every four children aged 3 to 17 did.

Schools have provided computer access to children from all backgrounds.

Nearly one in six children aged 3 to 17 had a computer at home in 1984, but by 1997, half of all children did. However, schools provided access for many more children. Among the 55 million children enrolled in school in 1997, 71 percent used a computer there.

In the mid- to late-1980s, children in private schools were significantly more likely to use a computer at school than children in public schools. The gap closed by 1993 and remained closed in 1997. However, private school students were still more likely than others to have and use a computer at home. Children in

families with the highest annual incomes (\$75,000 or more) were the most likely to use a computer (90 percent) at home or school, but the majority of children (62 percent) in families with the lowest incomes (under \$25,000) also used computers somewhere.

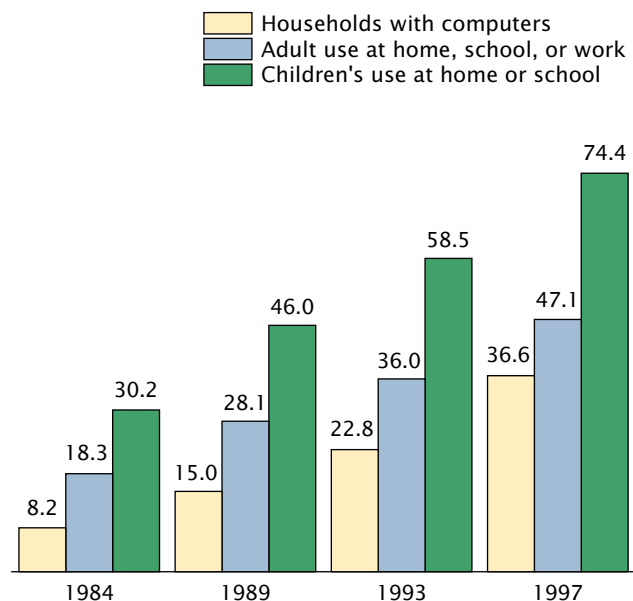
For many workers, computers have become as essential as desks.

About 92 million people aged 18 and older used a computer in 1997, nearly triple the number that did in 1984. Half of employed adults used a computer on

Figure 10-1.

Computer Presence in the Home, and Use at Home, School, or Work: 1984, 1989, 1993, and 1997

(Percent of households and percent of the populations aged 3 to 17 and aged 18 and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys, October 1984 to October 1997.

the job, more than twice the proportion that did in 1984. People in managerial and professional positions and technical, sales, and administrative support positions had by far the highest rates of computer use at work (75 percent and 68 percent, respectively). Women in every industry had higher levels of computer use at work than men.

The proportion of adults with a computer at home rose to 41 percent from just 9 percent in 1984. However, adult home computer ownership varied considerably with age, income, education, and region, according to the 1997 CPS. Adults aged 35 to 44 were the most likely to have a home computer (51 percent), while those aged 55 and older were the least likely (24 percent). Sixty-six percent of adults with a college degree had a computer at home, compared with only 13 percent of those without a high school diploma. Although

Table 10-A.

Differences in Computer Use at Work by Men and Women: 1997

Type of computer use	Total	Men	Women
Total number of employed people (in thousands)	128,198	68,801	59,397
Percent using a computer at work	49.8	44.1	56.5
Percent using the Internet at work	16.6	17.5	15.5
Total using a computer at work (in thousands)	63,876	30,322	33,544
Percent by type of computer use (ranked by total)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Word processing	57.0	53.9	59.8
Customer records	50.7	47.2	54.0
E-mail	47.0	51.3	43.1
Calendar/scheduling	37.5	39.2	36.0
Databases	34.1	36.8	31.6
Spreadsheets	32.4	35.7	29.4
Bookkeeping	30.2	28.7	31.7
Inventory control	28.8	34.0	24.1
Analysis	26.8	34.0	20.1
Sales/marketing	22.1	24.6	19.9
Invoicing	22.1	24.4	23.8
Graphics and publishing	20.4	24.3	17.0
Desktop publishing	15.3	15.2	15.4
Programming	15.0	20.0	10.0
Other reasons	12.6	13.1	12.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 1997.

77 percent of adults in families with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more had a computer at home, only 17 percent of those in families with incomes below \$25,000 did. Geographically, adults living in the South were the least likely to have a computer at home (37 percent) while those in the West were the most likely (47 percent).

In 1997, one in five Americans used the Internet.

Unlike computer use in general, where children were more likely to be users than adults, the overall proportions of Internet use among children (22.6 percent) and adults (22.1 percent) did not differ significantly.

Overall levels of Internet use varied across socioeconomic groups. White non-Hispanics, individuals in high-income families, and college graduates were the most likely to access the Internet. While there was no difference in the share of boys and girls who used the Internet, adult men were more likely than adult women to use the Internet, 25 percent compared with 20 percent. Adults were more likely to access the Internet from home than from work or school, but children were more likely to access the Internet from school than from home.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *Computer Use in the United States: October 1997* by Eric C. Newburger.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "C" and select "Computer Use and Ownership."
- Contact the Education and Social Stratification Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2422 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.